

Lava

CA-030-203

LAVA WILDERNESS STUDY AREA (WSA)

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1. THE STUDY AREA —

10,770 acres

The Lava WSA is located in northeastern Shasta County, California one-half mile southeast of the town of Fall River Mills. The WSA includes 10,770 acres of BLM lands with no private or State inholdings. The mineral estate is entirely in public ownership (see Map 1 and Table 1).

The WSA is an irregularly-shaped polygon which takes on a generally square shape. From the northwest corner of the WSA near the town of Fall River Mills, the west boundary consists of a BLM/private land interface. This 6.5-mile-long boundary is from one-fourth to one mile east of the paved Six Mile Hill Road south of Fall River Mills. The western boundary proceeds south to its intersection with an east-west cindered road known as the Cinder Cone Access Road which comprises five miles of the eight-mile length of the southern boundary. The other three miles of the southern boundary is made up of a BLM/private land interface around an intervening section of private land which abuts the Cinder Cone Access Road. At the east boundary the Cinder Cone Access Road intersects the Pittville Road and the boundary proceeds north along this road for approximately one mile. From the Pittville Road the boundary becomes an unimproved dirt road for approximately one and one-half miles west then north to a private section of land (section 36). The boundary continues along this BLM/private land interface for approximately one and one-half miles and again rejoins the unimproved dirt road for one and one-quarter miles in the far northeast corner of the WSA. The northern 5-1/4 mile-long boundary is a BLM/private land interface.

The WSA consists of an old lava flow with a prominent butte at the southern end rising approximately five hundred feet above the general elevation of the surrounding terrain. The ground surface is rocky and broken with buttes and broad depressions formed as a result of the cooling of lava flows. Vegetation consists of Ceanothus, or buckbrush, manzanita, oak, juniper, Digger pine, and widely scattered Ponderosa pine.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and suitability recommendations were analyzed in the North Central California Wilderness Final Environmental Impact Statement. Two suitability recommendations were analyzed in the EIS: an all-wilderness and a no-wilderness alternative.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE -

0	acres recommended for wilderness
10,770	BLM acres recommended for non-wilderness

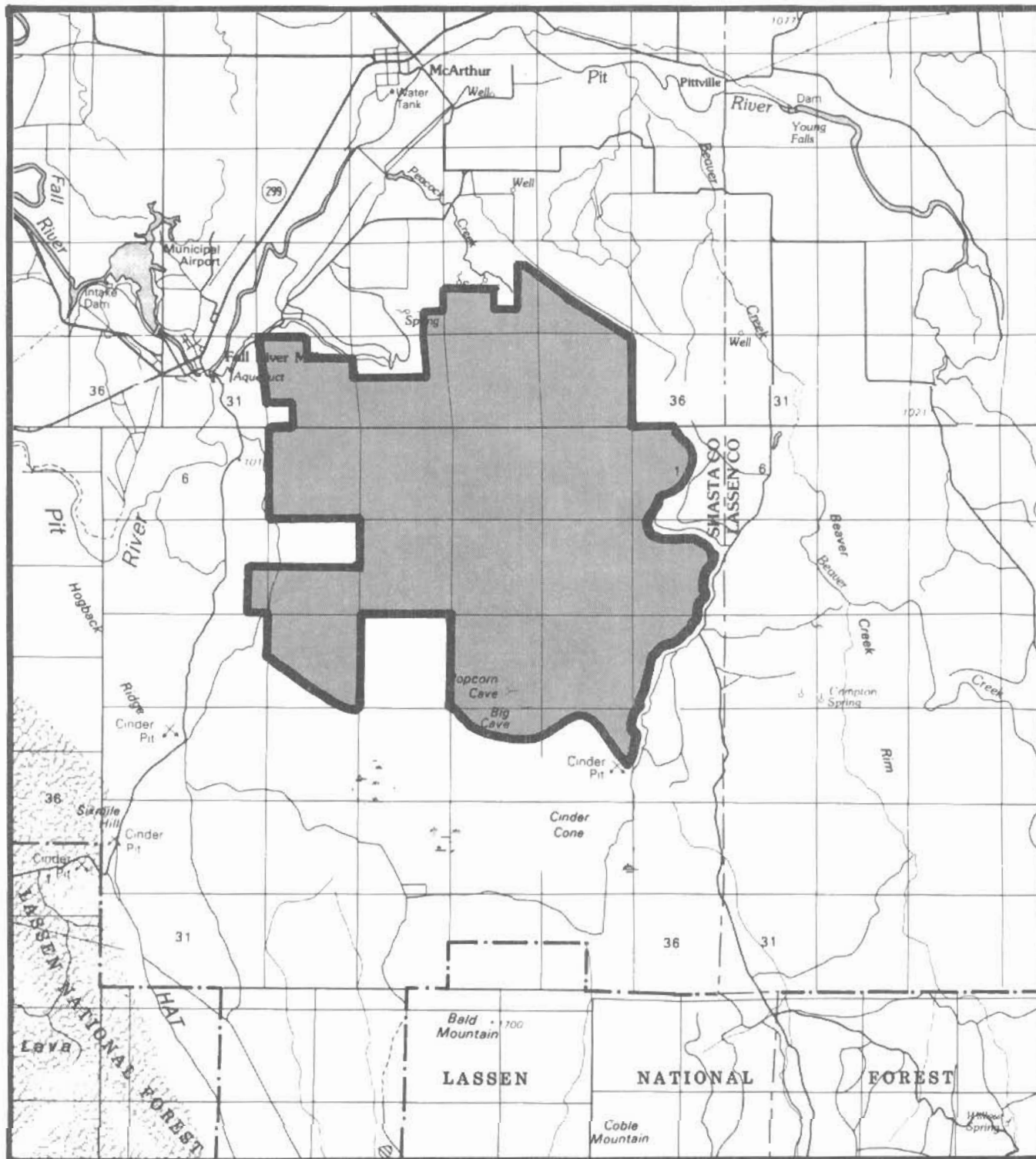
No wilderness is the recommendation for this WSA. The entire acreage in this WSA is released for uses other than wilderness. The all-wilderness alternative is considered to be the environmentally preferred alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The no-wilderness alternative will be implemented in a manner which will use all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

Although the wilderness values of naturalness, solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation are present in the WSA, the values were not considered of high enough quality to warrant wilderness designation. The WSA does not contain any significant single feature or combination of features such as vegetation, topography, wildlife, geology, or cultural and historic features. The lava terrain and landforms are common to the area and are already represented in other designated wilderness, such as Lava Beds, Lassen National Park and Thousand Lakes in the Lassen National Forest. This area does not stand out from much of the surrounding area. The rough surface of the lava rocks has kept roads out, but other than its lack of roads it is very similar and in common with other nearby locations.

The WSA is mostly natural with the exception of minor fuelwood and vehicular impacts along the western boundary and is expected to remain in a relatively natural condition regardless of wilderness designation due to its ruggedness and natural inaccessibility.

Visitor use is low in the WSA with the exception of seasonal use for mule deer and upland game hunting opportunities. The low visitor use reflects the lack of variety and diversity of recreational opportunities as well as lack of special features. Most use occurs on the periphery of the area close to the access ways. There is no recreation use of the center of the WSA, as it contains no attraction or natural corridors such as stream channels or ridge lines. The rough, uneven broken volcanic rock inhibits hiking, demanding continual direction changes to avoid obstacles. There is approximately one mile of unmaintained way which will remain available for vehicular use.

Resource conflicts were not a factor in the non-suitable recommendation. The Bald Eagle Nest Territory is currently given protection by a resource management plan decision and a habitat management plan.



T37N
T36N

T36N
T35N

R4E R5E

R5E R6E

NONE

RECOMMENDED FOR
WILDERNESS

RECOMMENDED FOR
NONWILDERNESS

LAND OUTSIDE WSA
RECOMMENDED FOR
WILDERNESS

SPLIT ESTATE

STATE

PRIVATE

SPLIT ESTATE

STATE

PRIVATE

Lava
Proposal
MAP-1

0 1 2 3
MILES

030-203
JUNE, 1988

TABLE 1 - Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area

<u>Within Wilderness Study Area</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	10,770
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings		
State		0
Private		0
Total		10,770
<u>Within Recommended Wilderness Boundary</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(within WSA)	0
BLM	(outside WSA)	0
Split Estate	(within WSA)	0
Split Estate	(outside WSA)	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness		0
Inholdings		
State		0
Private		0
<u>Within Area Not Recommended for Wilderness</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	10,770
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Total BLM Lands Not Recommended for Wilderness		10,770

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Wilderness Characteristics

1. Naturalness: The WSA is essentially natural in character. Several vehicle routes have been established by occasional vehicle use, three wildlife guzzlers (water catchments), and a limited amount of livestock fencing are present. None of these constitute significant intrusion on the naturalness of the area.
2. Solitude: The WSA generally offers opportunities for solitude. This is affected to a minor degree in the northwestern part by the proximity of the sights and sounds of Fall River Mills. The topography is broken enough and there is adequate vegetative screening to offer the visitor chances to avoid other visitors.

This WSA is periodically overflowed by military aircraft as part of the national defense mission taking place in approved military operating areas and flight corridors. The visual intrusions and associated noise create periodic temporary effects on solitude which are deemed necessary and acceptable as a part of the defense preparedness of the nation.

3. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: Hunting quality for deer and upland game is relatively high, and opportunities for hiking and primitive camping exist in the WSA. The terrain is common to the region and provides little recreational diversity. The low level of current use indicates the common nature of the recreation values.
4. Special Features: A bald eagle nest territory has been historically occupied in the far northwestern corner of the WSA. The nesting pair has occasionally moved to alternate nestsites on adjacent private lands though most of the territory occurs on public lands. The bald eagle is listed as Federally endangered. No other special features exist within the WSA.

B. Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

1. Assessing the diversity of natural systems and features as represented by ecosystems: This WSA contains 10,770 acres of the Sierran Forest/Western Ponderosa forest ecosystem. The Lava WSA would not increase the diversity of the types of ecosystems represented in the NWPS. In addition, this ecosystem is represented by the 6,703 acres within the Pit River Canyon WSA which have been recommended as suitable for wilderness designation.

TABLE 2 - Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification Domain/Province/PNV	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>Nationwide</u>				
Sierran Forest/Western Ponderosa Forest	1	815	2	28,880
<u>California</u>				
Sierran Forest/Western Ponderosa Forest	1	815	2	28,880

2. Expanding the opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation within a day's driving time (five hours) of major population centers: The WSA is within a five-hour drive of six major metropolitan areas. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population centers.

TABLE 3 - Wilderness Opportunities for Residents of Major Population Centers

Population Centers	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>California</u>				
Sacramento	46	5,001,817	87	2,479,541
Redding	14	1,236,503	11	344,633
Chico	16	1,286,873	13	430,822
Yuba City	44	4,951,805	85	2,459,500
<u>Oregon</u>				
Medford	31	2,440,081	21	730,038
<u>Nevada</u>				
Reno	39	4,647,230	175	6,904,809

3. Balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas: There are five existing units of the National Wilderness Preservation System within 50 air miles of the Lava WSA. These include four U.S. Forest Service units: Mt. Shasta, Castle Crags, Thousand Lakes, and Caribou; and one National Park Service unit; Lassen Volcanic. There are two other recommended suitable BLM WSA's within 50 air miles of Lava WSA: Pit River Canyon and Tunnison Mountain.

C. Manageability

The Lava WSA is manageable as wilderness, although some management problems do exist. The proximity of the town of Fall River Mills to the northwest corner of the WSA adversely affects the management for the wilderness characteristic of solitude. Privately owned lands between the Six Mile Hill Road and the west boundary of the WSA are subdivided and contain numerous residences. Trespass woodcutting, noise, litter, fire hazard, and other problems associated with constant human presence could adversely affect management for wilderness characteristics adjacent to this area.

The majority of the WSA is generally inaccessible to motor vehicles and unsuitable for other nonconforming uses which would impair management for wilderness characteristics.

Military overflights in this WSA must be considered to maintain the integrity of the existing and future national defense mission as well as the wilderness resource.

D. Energy and Mineral Resource Values

1. Summary of information known at time of preliminary suitability recommendation: A mineral resource report (Rogers 1982) reports negligible mineral potential except for volcanic cinders and lava rock used in construction and for decorative purposes. The true geothermal potential of the area cannot be determined except by further geologic and geophysical study. The entire study area has been classified by the U.S. Minerals Management Service as "prospectively valuable for geothermal steam and associated geothermal resources." The geothermal resource potential is considered to be low. The Minerals Management Service has further determined that "the lands are without value for other leasable minerals."

No known mining activity has occurred within the WSA. The 1977 Bureau of Mines MILS data show no mines or prospects within the WSA.

Two noncompetitive oil and gas leases (3,640 acres) have been issued in the northernmost and southernmost portions of the WSA.

Five cinder cones are present in the subject area. The major uses for volcanic cinders are for road-base construction and lightweight concrete aggregate. Minor uses include decorative landscaping and cindering of roads during the winter. Sources of cinders are abundant in this region, both on private and Federal lands. The lava rock in the WSA could theoretically be utilized for decorative or building purposes. There are, however, no indications that any of the stone in the WSA has been used for these purposes. Flat lava rock, which is considered especially valuable for building construction, does not occur in concentrated quantities in the study area.

2. Summary of significant new mineral resource data collected since the suitability recommendation which should be considered in the final recommendation: Since the area was recommended as non-suitable for wilderness designation there were no mineral surveys conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Mines and/or the U.S. Geological Survey. The current status of the two non-competitive oil and gas leases is that they have been terminated due to nonpayment. There is one placer mining claim which is mostly outside the WSA with a narrow band extending into the southwest corner of the WSA. No exploration or development activity has occurred within the WSA. A cinder pit exists on that portion of the claim located south of the road, and outside the WSA. Interest in mineral exploration is indicated by the following BLM mining claim record data, as of March 25, 1988 (see Table 4).

Table 4 - Mining Claims

TYPE	NO.			ACRES		
	SUITABLE	NONSUIT.	TOTAL	SUITABLE	NONSUIT.	TOTAL
Lode	0	0	0	0	0	0
Placer	0	1	1	0	40	40
Mill Sites	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	1	1	0	40	40

E. Impacts on Resources

Table 5 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	<p>The 10 percent of the area that is accessible to OHV would experience temporary disruptions of naturalness over much of its geographic extent from OHV use and such activities as timber harvesting, fuelwood harvesting, and the removal of flat lava rock. Within this area, the disruption of naturalness would be relatively permanent on 10 acres per year from the removal of flat lava rock and would last about five years on an average of 20 acres per year from fuelwood and timber harvesting.</p> <p>Impacts on opportunities for solitude would be similar to those described for naturalness and solitude would be preserved quite well on the 90 percent of the area that is inaccessible.</p> <p>Opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation in the WSA would remain available for those willing to avoid the above mentioned</p>	<p>Wilderness values would be well protected under this alternative. Naturalness and opportunities for solitude would be reduced on less than 15 acres from development designed to prevent OHV use of the area. The limited existing opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation would be retained and the special features of the WSA would be either unaffected or enhanced.</p>

Table 5 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative (Cont'd)

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values (Cont'd)	<p>disturbances or hike into the parts of the WSA that are inaccessible to OHVs.</p> <p>The geology of the area would not be impacted. Impacts on the other special feature—the bald eagle nest site—would be as described below for that issue.</p>	
Impacts on Nesting Success of Bald Eagles	It is predicted that the eagle nesting site will regain its productivity within three years. Management actions such as timber and fuelwood harvesting, prescribed burning, flat lava rock removal, limited OHV use, and powerline construction would have only negligible impacts on the eagles.	It is predicted that the eagle nesting would regain its productivity within three years.
Impacts on Mule Deer Population Levels	Winter and fall deer populations within the WSA would increase by from two to five percent (to a maximum of 620 and 520 deer, respectively) over the next 20 years because of planned vegetation manipulations.	Fall deer population levels within the WSA would remain at 200 to 500 animals, the winter population would remain at 300 to 600.
Impacts on Recreational Use Levels	Recreation use levels would remain at about 8,700 visitor days per year.	Recreational use levels would decrease to about 7,500 visitor days per year because of the OHV prohibition which would be only partially offset by the increased attraction of wilderness designation and the eagles.
Impacts on Timber Harvesting	There would be one timber sale of about 1.0 Mbf every 20 years and a fuelwood harvest of about 75 cords per year. Although this could be	There would be no timber or fuelwood harvesting within the WSA.

Table 5 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative (Cont'd)

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Timber Harvest- ing (Cont'd)	significant to individual local residents, it would not be significant in terms of the local economy.	
Impacts on the Volume of Flat Lava Rock Removed	About 75 tons of flat lava rock would be removed each year. This would not be important to the local economy.	There would be no removal of flat lava rock from within the WSA.

F. Local Social and Economic Considerations

No local social or economic considerations were identified in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. Therefore no further discussion of this topic will occur in this document.

G. Summary of WSA - Specific Comments

1. Inventory phase: A total of seven written comments were received during the inventory phase. One supported the recommendation of the area as a WSA, three comments applied to study phase considerations, and three provided inventory information which had been previously considered during the inventory.
2. Study phase: The Notice of Intent to conduct the wilderness study was published in the Federal Register on December 17, 1980. The public was also notified through media releases in local and regional newspapers and through letters to individuals and organizations on the District's mailing list.

Following this announcement, over 700 planning newsletters and 300 copies of the Planning Criteria Document were sent to the public at large requesting comments, concerns, and identification of known management problems and opportunities. In addition to public involvement during the planning process, a scoping announcement was published in the Federal Register on September 30, 1981.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement was filed with the Environmental Protection Agency in May 1983, and mailed to interested organizations and individuals. A Notice of Availability appeared in the Federal Register, No. 48, No. 108 on June 3, 1983, establishing a 90-day public review period.

During the public comment period (June 3 to September 6, 1983) one formal hearing was conducted to solicit public advice and comments regarding the proposed action and alternatives.

Thirty-one written comments were received and four individuals testified at the public hearing. The Atlantic Richfield Company, Fall River Big Valley Cattlemen's Association, California Mining Association, The Minerals Exploration Coalition, and Pacific Gas and Electric Company were organizations providing written comments supporting a non-wilderness designation. The Sierra Club, California Wilderness Coalition, the Wilderness Society, and the Northeast Californians for Wilderness presented oral testimony, all of which favored a wilderness designation.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Soil Conservation Service (SCS) and the State of California Resources Agency all commented on the draft EIS. The EPA mentioned that water quality discussion was minimal which we explained was due to the lack of any projected future uses of the area that would affect water quality. The SCS mentioned that soils information may be needed if erosion is a problem. We responded by pointing out that there were no projected management actions that would cause erosion. The California Resources Agency mentioned that endangered and sensitive wildlife species such as the Bald Eagle should be protected from OHV use. The BLM responded that the nest site is already protected from OHV use by a RMP management action with or without wilderness.

No comments were received from local governments.